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ABSTRACT

Most researchers recognize a moderate but reliable relationship between stress and illness. One personality variable that might increase susceptibility to symptoms of strain and physical illness is hopelessness, while one variable that was initially proposed as a mediator of the relationship between stress and illness is hardiness, a personality style that enables some people to remain healthy even after experiencing high levels of stress. This study was conducted to examine the possible relationships among hardiness, hopelessness, and strain. Undergraduate students (N=305) completed a questionnaire packet consisting of the Hopelessness Scale, a version of the Hardiness Scale, and a checklist of strain symptoms. Significant correlations were found among hopelessness, hardiness, and strain. Hopelessness was negatively correlated with the hardiness composite and with each of the three hardiness subcomponents. Strain was negatively correlated with hardiness and positively correlated with hopelessness. While hopelessness and hardiness were moderately correlated, they each accounted for unique portions of the variance in strain scores. (NB)

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Hopelessness and Hardiness: A Strained Relationship

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Hopelessness and Hardiness: A Strained Relationship

PROBLEM: Most researchers recognize a moderate, but reliable relationship between stress and illness (Rodin & Salovey, 1989). Attempts to increase understanding of the stress-illness relationship have yielded numerous models involving potential mediating variables. One variable that was initially proposed as a mediator of the relationship between stress and illness is hardiness (Kobasa, 1979), a personality style that enables some people to remain healthy even after experiencing high levels of stress. Hardy individuals tend to demonstrate (a) involvement in, rather than alienation from, activities (commitment); (b) a view of change as a challenge rather than a threat (challenge); and (c) a tendency to feel and act as if they can influence and control their environment (control) (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982). More recently, Kobasa (1982a) has shown that hardiness is directly related to symptoms of physical and mental strain.

A personality variable that might increase susceptibility to symptoms of strain and physical illness is hopelessness. A hopeless individual embraces a system of negative expectancies concerning himself and his future (Stotland, 1969). The Hopelessness Scale (Beck, Weisman, Lester, & Trexler, 1974) is strongly associated with both depression and eventual suicide (Beck, Steer, Kovacs, & Garrison, 1985). The current study examined the possible relationships among hardiness, hopelessness, and strain.

METHOD: The sample consisted of 305 undergraduates at the University of Florida who completed a questionnaire packet that included the Hopelessness Scale (Beck et al., 1974), a 50-item version of the Hardiness Scale provided by Kobasa (1989), and a 16-item checklist of strain symptoms (Horowitz, 1976).

RESULTS: Significant correlations were found among the three variables of interest. Hopelessness was negatively correlated with the hardiness composite, $r = -.34$, $p < .0001$, as well as each of the three hardiness subcomponents (see Table 1). As expected, strain was negatively correlated with the hardiness composite, $r = -.35$, $p < .0001$, and each of the subcomponents (see Table 1), and positively correlated with hopelessness, $r = .36$, $p < .0001$.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the unique predictive effects of hardiness and hopelessness in accounting for strain. Together, these two variables accounted for 21% of the variance of the strain measure. Significant unique predictive effects were obtained for both hardiness, $b^* = -.24$, $t(260) = -4.17$, $p < .0001$, and hopelessness, $b^* = .32$, $t(260) = 5.52$, $p < .0001$.

INTERPRETATION: The results of this study replicate previous research on the relationship between hardiness and strain (Kobasa, 1982a) and provide evidence for the independent influence of hopelessness on strain. While hopelessness and hardiness were moderately correlated, they each accounted for unique portions of the variance in strain scores. Previous research has shown a

moderate correlation between hopelessness and optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985) suggesting that, while these two variables are related (as they should be) they do not measure opposite poles of the same dimension. Given Scheier and Carver's (1987) concern about "empirical overlap" between optimism and hardiness, the hopelessness - hope dimension may provide an alternative for increasing predictive power in future investigations of the relation between hardiness and illness.

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Table 1

Intercorrelations Among Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Hardiness	- -					
2. Hopelessness	-.34	- -				
3. Challenge	.79	-.12*	- -			
4. Commitment	.89	-.35	.54	- -		
5. Control	.79	-.40	.37	.64	- -	
6. Strain	-.35	.36	-.22	-.32	-.31	- -

* $p < .05$.

Note. Except as noted, all p's < .0001.